

APR 22 1976

# Missing Man's Bloody Trace

ALAMO—The bloodstained and bullet-shattered auto of a 33-year-old Pleasant Hill man was found here yesterday by a friend, but authorities said there was no sign of the vehicle's owner.

Joel Stephens is the manager of the same Oakland bill-collection agency that Gary R. Brown, 30, managed before he was found shot to death in his Rockridge district home last November.

Investigators said the two men were "best of friends" and were also partners in other business interests.

Mr. Stephens' car was found by another friend, Bill McElhinney, of Alamo, parked on a road about 100 yards from Mr. McElhinney's home.

Mr. McElhinney told investigators Mr. Stephens called him Tuesday afternoon and said he would visit Mr. McElhinney's home that day, but he never arrived.

Mr. Stephens' wife, Marlissa, told Contra Costa sheriff's deputies her husband left home at about 9 p.m. Tuesday, saying he would be gone about an hour, and never returned.

When his car was found, the ignition and headlight switches were both on. Windows in the driver and passenger doors were both shot out, but investigators noted none of the window glass had fallen outside the car.

Mrs. Stephens was to file an official missing person report on her husband with Pleasant Hill police today.

He is manager of the Central Adjustment Bureau, 235 W. MacArthur Blvd.,

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the same firm that had been managed by Mr. Brown before his murder. Spokesmen for the firm refused to say whether Mr. Stephens had replaced Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown was last seen alive last Thanksgiving Day. He did not report to work the following day, and his body was found in a bedroom at 5416 Golden Gate Ave. on Nov. 28 by another occupant of the house, Michael Murphy.

Mr. Brown's murder remains unsolved.

# Missing Man Carried Gun

APR 23 1976

Tribune Martinez Bureau

A missing Pleasant Hill man, whose bullet scarred, blood-stained Cadillac was found abandoned Wednesday, had been fearful for his life and had taken to carrying a gun, according to Contra Costa County sheriff's investigators.

An all-points bulletin has been issued for the missing man, Joel Stephens, 33, of 1924 Lucille Lane, Pleasant Hill. His car was found less than a quarter mile from a friend's house in Alamo who Stephens reportedly was on his way to see.

Sheriff's detectives said according to acquaintances, Mr. Stephens had been extremely nervous since his coworker and close friend in an Oakland collection agency was found murdered in Oakland last November. The two were partners in various outside business ventures and were coowners of some horses. Stephens also owned property in Modesto and Northern California.

He had taken to carrying his own pistol, according to Sgts. Ken Dyer and Floyd Snodgrass and in the past month had told friends he was fearful for his safety and thought he was being followed.

Authorities have never found the kill-

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er of his former business partner, Gary Brown. Mr. Stephens had assumed the Central Adjustment Bureau, located at 235 West MacArthur Blvd. in Oakland, sheriff's officers said.

Both the driver and passenger windows in Stephens car had been shattered, apparently by a single bullet. One slug was found in the passenger side door.

There was a small amount of blood on the seat and some stains on the passenger door. There were also reportedly some bone fragments found in the car.

But a search of the area failed to turn up a body.

Mr. Stephens was last seen about 9 p.m. Tuesday when he left his home to visit a friend, Bill McElhinney, at his house in Alamo.

He never made it. Residents in the area reported hearing two shots in rapid succession about 11 p.m. Tuesday, according to Dyer and Snodgrass, and then the sound of someone running and a car speeding off.

Mr. Stephens' empty car was found about 8 a.m. Wednesday by McElhinney. The lights were still on, the transmission in drive and the key in the ignition.

Dyer and Snodgrass said Mr. Stephens was very "secretive" about his private life and would not even talk to his wife of 18 months, Marlissa, about his past.

## Money Angle

# New Clues in APR 24 1976 Eastbay Slaying

Tribune Martinez Bureau

Joel Stephens, the Pleasant Hill man missing since Wednesday when his blood-spattered car was found abandoned, apparently owed large sums of money to persons he supposedly had promised to pay back this week, The Tribune has learned.

As of last night, there was still no trace of Stephens, 33, an executive with an Oakland collection agency.

His luxury car, its driver and passenger door windows blown out by gunshots and blood stains on the seat, was found near a friend's home in Alamo.

However, there was no blood found outside the car, nor was there any glass outside from the shattered windows. The front seat area was covered with glass particles, deputies said.

Earlier reports there were bone fragments in the vehicle were incorrect, according to Sheriff's Capt. Richard Rainey.

The money Stephens reportedly owed, The Tribune learned, was said to be in excess of \$10,000. The loans were reportedly personal in

nature.

Stephens did have partial interests in valuable quarter-horses, and was said by acquaintances to gamble on occasion. He also owned property in Modesto and Northern California.

As The Tribune reported yesterday, Stephens in the last few weeks had taken to carrying a pistol, telling friends he was fearful for his safety and that he thought he was being followed.

He had been extremely nervous since his former "best friend" and coworker Gary Brown was found slain in his Oakland home last November. No one has ever been charged with that killing.

Ironically, Stephens took Brown's position as collections manager at the firm they worked for, Central Adjustment Bureau, 235 West MacArthur Boulevard.

Stephens was described as 5 feet 6 tall, 190 pounds, and was last wearing burgundy-colored slacks, a light-colored shirt, padded blue windbreaker jacket and black cowboy boots. He also wore gold wire-rim glasses.



# Confusing Puzzle Of a Missing Man

APR 27 1976

## Tribune Martinez Bureau

Evidence has turned up some discrepancies in the disappearance of a Pleasant Hill man whose blood-stained car was found abandoned last week.

Joel Stephens, an executive with an Oakland collection agency, has not been seen since leaving home last Tuesday night to visit a friend in Alamo.

His Cadillac, with both driver and passenger-side windows shattered by gunshots, was found less than a quarter-mile from the friend's home.

Contra Costa County Sheriff's Capt. Richard Rainey said yesterday that evidence gathered showed:

—Apparently no one was sitting in the front seat of the car when the shots were fired. There was too much glass in the seat and none outside the vehicle.

—Also, there was too much gun muzzle-residue on the seat for someone to have been sitting there when the shots were fired. Capt. Rainey said that when a gun is fired, substances other than a bullet come from the muzzle and there was too much of one substance imbedded in the seats.

—The amount of blood found on the seat and driver's door was insufficient to be

consistent with a gunshot wound. Authorities said it was more likely someone cut himself on the shattered glass.

Capt. Rainey said crime laboratory technicians have determined the blood to be human — but whether it is the missing man's cannot be determined until his blood type is made known to investigating officers.

According to Capt. Rainey, the one slug recovered from the car was fired from a .38-caliber pistol. Stephens had a similar gun registered in his name.

The Tribune reported earlier that Stephens had taken to carrying a gun in the last several weeks, telling friends he was fearful for his life and

felt he was being followed.

He had been extremely nervous, acquaintances said, since his former coworker and close friend, Gary Brown, was found murdered in his Oakland home last November. That killing remains unsolved.

The two had been partners in several private business ventures.

The Tribune earlier learned that Stephens was heavily in debt at the time of his disappearance. He supposedly had promised to repay some of his debtors last week.

The night before Stephens' car was found, residents in the area reported hearing two shots, then someone running away and a car speeding off.

## 'Foul Play' Theory

# Death Probe Stumped

APR 30 1976

### Tribune Martinez Bureau

The Contra Costa County sheriff's office has reached a dead end in its investigation of the mysterious disappearance of a Pleasant Hill man 10 days ago.

Although investigators feel there was some "foul play," they said there is no evidence to support the belief that harm may have come to Joel Stephens, 33, who was an executive with an Oakland collection agency.

Stephens has not been seen since his late-model Cadillac, its windows shattered by gunfire and its seats splattered with blood, was found near a friend's home in Alamo last week.

Sheriff's Capt. Richard Rainey said his office still is keeping the case "open," but will assist Pleasant Hill police, who have a missing-person report filed on Stephens.

Capt. Rainey said evidence shows that no one could have been sitting in the car when the shots were fired.

The Tribune previously reported that Stephens was heavily in debt and had promised to repay some of the money last week, about the time he disappeared.

It since has been revealed that Stephens told some friends he planned to leave town on a trip last Friday, but his intended destination was not disclosed.

Stephens had been extremely upset since his close friend and coworker, Gary Brown, was found murdered last

Thanksgiving in Oakland. He had taken to carrying a gun in the last few weeks. The killing of Brown remains unsolved.

The one slug recovered from Stephens' car was fired

from a .38-caliber pistol. Stephens had a similar gun registered in his name.

A Pleasant Hill police spokesman said there has been no response to the alert issued by his department.

# 'Missing' Man Is Arrested

SEP 21 1978

PLEASANT HILL — Joel Stephens, who disappeared April 21 after his blood-stained, bullet-shattered car was found, has been arrested here, but where he was for almost five months remains a mystery.

Stephens was arrested last week at a local hotel for carrying a concealed weapon.

But he apparently refused to tell police anything about his whereabouts or his car

and was released on bail.

Stephens was last seen April 20 when he left his home at 1924 Lucille Lane, telling his wife he was going to visit a friend and return in an hour. He did not return.

The next day his late model Cadillac was found a 100 yards from the friend's home in Alamo, the windows shattered by gunshots and blood spotting the seats.



# Another Disappearance

OCT 2 1976

## Tribune Martinez Bureau

The disappearing man has vanished again.

Joel Stephens, 33, of Pleasant Hill, who dropped out of sight for five months earlier this year after his blood-splattered, bullet-shattered car was found, failed to show up in Mt. Diablo Municipal Court yesterday.

Judge John Hatzenbuehler

forfeited Stephens' bail and issued a bench warrant for his arrest with a new bail of \$500.

Stephens was scheduled to appear on a concealed weapon charge, for which he had been arrested by Pleasant Hill police Sept. 11, the first time he was seen since he disappeared April 20. What he did during that period is known only to him, since he would not dis-

cuss it with police.

No charges have ever been filed against Stephens concerning his disappearance. The gun charge stems from officers finding a pistol on Stephens when he was spotted at a Pleasant Hill hotel.